

# **Evolving Indigenous Approaches to Coastal Watershed Stewardship: Research and Planning Processes Initiated by the Tsleil-Waututh First Nation in Indian Arm and the Indian River Valley**

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## **Abstract**

The Indian River drains a small 20,000 hectare coastal watershed located just north of metropolitan Vancouver at the head of Indian Arm. The Tsleil-Waututh First Nation has utilized this watershed as a source of a wide variety of natural resources for thousands of years. Over the past 150 years the basin has been heavily exploited for its forest, mineral and fish resources by government and corporate interests. At present, very little of the old growth forest remains, and the narrow valley is occupied by over 100 kilometers of logging roads, a 500 kV hydroelectric transmission line, a gas pipeline, and a log dump. All these developments have had outflow effects on Indian Arm, a deep fjord that remains relatively isolated from tidal flows in Burrard Inlet and the Strait of Georgia.

The Tsleil-Waututh First Nation has taken a leadership role in designing and implementing a comprehensive 'Watershed Stewardship' initiative for Indian Arm and the Indian River valley. This process has involved activities including completion of detailed biophysical mapping, negotiating a co-management agreement for Indian Arm Provincial Park, the private purchase of 400 hectares of forest lands on which eco-forestry is being practiced, restoration of wild salmon runs, and a number of related initiatives. The purpose of this presentation is to highlight the role an urban First Nation has played in putting its indigenous land and water stewardship ethic into practice.